Jim Henson's™

THE STORYTELLER™

Tale Two of Four

Tricksters

ARCHAIA™

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a Heart *that* Beats Forever

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Special Thanks to Brian Henson, Lisa Henson, Jim Formanek, Nicole Goldman, Carla DellaVedova, Karen Falk, Blanca Lista, Shannon Robles, the entire Jim Henson Company team, Wendy Froud, and Brian Froud.

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PRINTED IN CANADA.

RAP RAP RAP

PELE, EXCUSE ME-- GRANT A POOR MAIDEN SHELTER FROM THE STORM? I'VE BEEN WALKING SO VERY LONG.

A VISITOR!

AN INTRUDER!

BORK. BORK. WHINE. WHINE. BORK.

FORGIVE MY HOUND, IT'S SIMPLY BEEN AGES SINCE WE'VE HAD ANY--

--COMPANY.

Boof?

I TOLD YOU HE'D WARM UP TO YOU!

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SCOLDED HIM. AFTER ALL, I'M A STRANGER...

AND PEOPLE ARE SELDOM AS THEY SEEM.

A FAVORITE SAYING OF MINE!

SIGH HERE HE GOES AGAIN.

ONCE UPON A TIME--

ACTUALLY, I'VE THOUGHT OF A STORY AS WELL.

...

SHALL I TELL IT? TO REPAY YOU BOTH FOR YOUR KINDNESS?

HEH. I'M OUT OF PRACTICE ***LISTENING*** TO STORIES.

YOU'RE OUT OF PRACTICE LISTENING ***PERIOD.***

YOU'RE IN LUCK. IN MY HOMELAND, STORIES ARE GROUP ACTIVITIES. MOST PEOPLE LEARN THEIR PARTS AS CHILDREN, BUT I'LL TEACH YOU NOW.

I HOPE THIS TEA HAS WARMED UP YOUR SINGING VOICES...

SEVERAL TONE-DEAF MINUTES LATER...

GODS HELP ME...WELL, I SUPPOSE THAT'S AS GOOD AS WE'LL EVER GET. *AHEH!* HERE GOES.

WHAT IS A GOD?

SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!

AHEH, I WILL NOT TELL A LIE. WHAT IS A STORY?

A HEART THAT BEATS FOREVER.

GOOD. NOW HEAR MY HEART.

WHEN **OLODUMARE**, MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, BREATHED TIME INTO BEING AND SENT HIS GODLING ORISHAS TO RULE THE WORLD, THEY CLAIMED US HUMANS AS THEIR DEVOTEES, MARKING US ONCE WE REACHED ADULTHOOD.

WE BOWED TO THEIR DIVINE WILL, LETTING THEIR MARKS DETERMINE OUR LIVES.

THOSE ALIGNED WITH **SHANGO**, GOD OF THUNDER, WOULD LEARN TRADES OF FIRE AND FORGES.

THOSE WITH **OKO**, GOD OF THE HUNT, WOULD BE GREAT WARRIORS.

THOSE WITH **OSHUN**, NURTURERS OF FAMILIES... AND SO ON. WE REVERED GODS AS CONSTANT. CONSISTENT.

FOR WHILE MORTALS ARE SLAVES TO OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, TO HUNGER, LUST, AND THIRST...A GOD IS A SLAVE ONLY TO THEIR NATURE. HOW ELSE, WE REASONED, COULD THEY REIGN OVER CREATION?

BUT WE WERE WRONG.

WHAT IS A GOD?

SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!

YES! NOW HEAR OF A NEW GOD--**ESHU**, COMMANDER OF WINDS AND FATE, TOPPLER OF KINGS, MASTER OF EVERY TONGUE, AND SOLE CONVEYOR OF SACRIFICES BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH.

HAIL ESHU, GOD OF **CHANGE**! GOD OF CUNNING AND CHAOS, HE SHUNS CONSTANCY, AND IS SLAVE TO NOTHING.

NOT EVEN HIS OWN NATURE.

ESHU'S DEVOTEES ARE FEW, FOR HUMANS FEAR HIM, AND HE RARELY CLAIMS MORTALS WITH HIS MARK. HIS WORSHIPPERS, OFTEN GREEDY KINGS AND MERCHANT LORDS, OFFEND HIM WITH THEIR PREDICTABILITY.

OH GREAT ESHU! CONFUSE THE RANKS OF MY ENEMIES, THAT WE MAY SLAUGHTER THEM IN BATTLE!

MOST ESTEEMED ESHU, TURN THE ROADS TO MUCK, SO MY RIVALS ARE HOMEBOUND, AND WILL NOT THREATEN MY SALES AT THE MARKET!

WHEN ESHU DOES REPLY, HE OFTEN DOES PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT HE IS ASKED...HE IS A GOD OF TRICKS, AFTER ALL. BUT EVEN MISCHIEF IS A FORM OF CONSTANCY, AND SO JUST AS OFTEN, HE IS FAITHFUL...FOR CHANGE IS WHO HE IS.

NO MATTER HOW LONELY IT MAKES HIM.

HEAR ME, ESHU! PLEASE ACCEPT MY SACRIFICE...

ANOTHER PRAYER... -*SIGH*- WHAT WILL IT BE THIS TIME? A KING OFFERING GOLD? A WARLORD OFFERING THE HEADS OF HIS ENEMIES?

BUT TO ESHU'S SURPRISE, THE PRAYER COMES FROM A YOUNG WOMAN--BARELY MORE THAN A GIRL, BEFORE A MAKESHIFT ALTAR.

INTRIGUED, ESHU DOES SOMETHING HE HASN'T DONE IN AGES...

...HE APPEARS BEFORE HER, IN ALL HIS GLORY.

I, THE GREAT GOD ESHU, WILL HEAR YOUR REQUEST...

...HUMBLE AS YOUR OFFERING IS. I HAVE NEVER RECEIVED A VESSEL OF INDIGO DYE.

THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S THE HARDEST KIND TO MAKE.

WELL? HAVE YOU NO REQUEST? WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK?

OH. SORRY. IT'S JUST-- YOU'RE BIGGER THAN YOU USED TO BE.

DO YOU PRESUME TO KNOW A GOD?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER *ME?* I'M OYINLOLLA-- THE GIRL YOU USED TO PLAY WITH. LOLLA FOR SHORT.

USED TO...*AH.* WELL, IF YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH, I WOULD HARDLY REMEMBER YOU. WE MUST HAVE MET IN MY PREVIOUS LIFE-CYCLE.

CYCLE?

GODS DO NOT AGE AS MORTALS DO. TO US, TIME IS A CIRCLE--WE CYCLE CONSTANTLY BETWEEN YOUTH, PRIME, AND OLD AGE. EVERY STAGE, YOUNG OR OLD, IS LIKE BEING BORN ANEW.

OH. BUT... IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR LAST STAGE, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

WHO I AM? ***WHO I AM?*** I AM ***ESHU, COMMANDER OF FATE.*** THEY SING OF ME IN TEMPLES AND FESTIVAL SQUARES! GRIOTS SPIN TALES OF MY EXPLOITS FROM DAWN TO DUSK!

I NEED NOT "*REMEMBER*" A GIRL FROM ONE OF MY MILLENNIA OF CYCLES TO KNOW WHO I AM.

BUT WE ***DID*** MEET. YOU USED TO PLAY WITH ME ALL THE TIME! CAN'T YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING?

NO. AND YES. WHEN MORTALS TELL STORIES OF THE GODS, THEY MANIFEST IN THE CIRCLE OF TIME. THEY BECOME TRUE, WHETHER THEY HAPPENED OR NOT.

I HAVE LIVED COUNTLESS LIVES, AND ANSWERED MANY PRAYERS, THOUGH THE MORTALS WHO WILL PRAY THEM ARE NOT YET BORN.

THAT'S AN AWFULLY FANCY WAY OF SAYING YOU HAVE AMNESIA.

I GROW TIRED OF YOUR IMPUDENCE! YOU HAVE INSULTED ME FOR THE LAST TIME. WE WILL SEE HOW LONG YOU DOUBT MY MIGHT--

THEN YOU'RE AN IMPOSTER.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

YOU CAN'T BE ESHU! ESHU IS THE GOD OF CHANGE-- OF UNPREDICTABILITY. BUT NOW YOU'RE GOING TO CURSE ME FOR OFFENDING YOU...JUST LIKE EVERY OTHER GOD. AREN'T YOU?

...ARE YOU TRYING TO MANIPULATE ME?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. I'M JUST A SILLY MORTAL.

...HOW ABOUT I TELL YOU THE STORY OF HOW WE MET?

BUT WHY ISN'T SHE AFRAID OF ESHU? AFTER ALL, HE'S A GOD! ISN'T SHE SCARED HE WILL HURT HER?

Is it just me, or does she look older now?

WOULD YOU FEAR SOMEONE WHO ***PROTECTED*** YOU FOR YOUR ENTIRE CHILDHOOD?

OF COURSE NOT. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT ESHU DID FOR LOLLA.

BABA WAS THE BEST IRONSMITH IN OUR VILLAGE, BUT HIS TONGUE WAS AS HOT AND SHARP AS HIS TOOLS.

I DISAPPOINTED HIM BY BEING A GIRL-- THAT MEANS I CAN NEVER INHERIT HIS TRADE.

USELESS

WHY couldn't the gods bless me with a SON NO ONE will want to marry YOU

"AND SO, UNTIL I WAS OLD ENOUGH TO MARRY OFF, I WAS JUST ANOTHER MOUTH TO FEED.

"I LEARNED QUICKLY TO STAY OUT OF HIS WAY. I WOULD HAVE BEEN LONELY...

"...IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU.

"YOU VISITED EVERY NIGHT, KEEPING ME COMPANY. BUT YOU ALSO PROTECTED ME. BECAUSE WHEN BABA WAS DEEP IN HIS PALM WINE, THERE WAS NO PLACE I COULD HIDE.

"HE WOULD TRY TO CHASE ME INTO THE BUSH FOREST, BUT YOU TRICKED HIM-- MADE HIM SEE THINGS.

"JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO ESCAPE TO MY FAVORITE PLACE--GRANDMOTHER'S COMPOUND BY THE SEA."

"GRANDMOTHER WAS A MASTER DYER. HER CLOTH WRAPPERS, AND THE STORIES THEY TOLD, WERE THE MOST VIBRANT IN OUR REALM. I WAS ALWAYS HAPPIEST WITH GRANDMOTHER.

"SHE DIED TWO DRY SEASONS AGO, AND I HOPED TO TAKE HER PLACE AS THE VILLAGE DYER.

"AFTER ALL, BABA DIDN'T WANT ME.

"BUT THEN, I CAME OF AGE. YOU STOPPED VISITING ME, LORD ESHU...AND THE GODDESS OSHUN CLAIMED ME WITH HER MARK.

"ALL OF A SUDDEN, BABA WANTED TO CLAIM ME, TOO, FOR OSHUN IS DEEPLY REVERED IN OUR VILLAGE.

"GIRLS WHO MANIFEST OSHUN'S MARK FETCH A HIGH BRIDE PRICE, NO MATTER HOW LOWLY THEIR PARENTS ARE, SINCE WE ARE CONSIDERED ESPECIALLY FERTILE.

"SO I WAS SENT TO LIVE IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE OTHER OSHUN-ALIGNED GIRLS, WAITING FOR A SUITABLE HUSBAND TO MAKE AN OFFER TO MY FATHER."

AND?

AND I MANAGED TO ESCAPE. I'VE BEEN HIDING HERE, AT MY GRANDMOTHER'S OLD COMPOUND, SO I COULD BUILD AN ALTAR AND SUMMON YOU.

YOU HELPED ME SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, LORD ESHU. SO... I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HELP ME NOW.

NOW THAT YOU'VE TOLD THE STORY... I KNOW IT. I KNOW ***YOU.***

HE REMEMBERS THAT SHE MADE HIM FEEL LESS ALONE.

BUT WHY DID YOU RUN FROM OSHUN'S TEMPLE? MOST MORTAL GIRLS WOULD CONSIDER THEMSELVES LUCKY TO BE IN YOUR POSITION.

DON'T YOU WANT TO MARRY A WEALTHY VILLAGE BOY?

OF COURSE. THAT'S WHAT ALL GIRLS WANT, RIGHT? BUT I DON'T JUST WANT ***ANY*** WEALTHY MAN. I WANT THE BEST ONE...

*"**TUNDE THE OKO-ALIGNED!** HE'S PERFECT...STRONG, HANDSOME. JUST **DREAMY.** BUT HE'S PROMISED TO SOMEONE ELSE. ANOTHER OSHUN-ALIGNED GIRL NAMED...MORENIKE. YES. THAT'S IT.*

"SWEET, PRETTY MORENIKE. SHE'S GOING TO BE HIS FIRST WIFE. I CAN STILL MARRY TUNDE AFTER HER, OF COURSE, BUT THEN I'D ONLY BE HIS JUNIOR WIFE--SHE WOULD ALWAYS COME FIRST."

AND HERE I WAS, THINKING YOU'D ASK FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL. I SHOULDN'T HAVE HOPED--YOU'RE JUST AS INSIPID AS ANY OTHER MORTAL.

LET ME GUESS...YOU WANT ME TO MAKE TUNDE FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU?

NO... I WOULDN'T WANT HIS FEELINGS TO BE FORCED. I JUST NEED HELP GETTING MORENIKE OUT OF THE WAY.

I WANT YOU TO TAKE AWAY MORENIKE'S MARK...AND GIVE HER YOURS INSTEAD. TUNDE WILL NEVER MARRY HER THEN. BECAUSE--WELL--

BECAUSE I AM THE MOST ***FEARED*** AND ***REVILED*** OF ALL THE GODS? BECAUSE MORTALS ONLY WORSHIP ME TO ENSURE THAT THEIR OFFERINGS TO OTHER GODS REACH THE HEAVENS SAFELY?

WELL-- YES. AND THAT'S HOW I CAN HELP YOU.

HELP ME?

"STORIES ARE IMPORTANT TO GODS, RIGHT? IT'S HOW YOUR WORSHIPPERS LEARN ABOUT YOU, AND HOW GODS GROW MORE POWERFUL.

"GRANDMOTHER USED TO TELL ALL SORTS OF STORIES WITH HER CLOTH WRAPPERS.

"I CAN DYE AS BEAUTIFULLY AS GRANDMOTHER. I CAN TELL YOUR STORIES. MAYBE THEN...MORE PEOPLE WOULD WORSHIP YOU. WOULD...WELL. **KNOW** YOU."

LOLLA'S PROPOSITION DEEPLY APPEALS TO ESHU, AND SO HE AGREES TO THE BARGAIN.

I WILL NOT CHANGE MORENIKE'S MARK DIRECTLY, FOR I DO NOT WISH TO INVOKE OSHUN'S IRE. INSTEAD, I WILL GIVE THAT POWER TO YOU.

DRINK THIS POTION AT HIGH TIDE, THREE MOONS FROM NOW-- WHEN MERCURY, MY PATRON STAR, IS CLOSEST TO EARTH. THEN, YOU WILL HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE MORENIKE'S MARK TO MINE.

BUT ESHU IS BORED BY LOLLA'S DESIRE FOR TUNDE, AND IRRITATED BY HER PETTY ATTACK ON MORENIKE...AND SO, HE DECIDES TO ***DECEIVE*** HER.

IN REALITY, THE POTION HE HAS GIVEN HER WILL GIVE LOLLA, AND NOT MORENIKE, THE MARK OF ESHU...MAKING LOLLA FOREVER UNDESIRABLE.

DON'T TAKE IT, LOLLA!

HOW CAN SHE TRUST HIM LIKE THAT? IS SHE FOOLED?

AH-AH! BUT THIS IS NOT THE SONG I TAUGHT YOU. YOU MUST SING YOUR PARTS. *WHAT IS A GOD?*

SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!

AHEH. WHAT IS A STORY?

A HEART THAT BEATS FOREVER.

GOOD. AND YOU HAVE NOT YET HEARD MY HEART.

LOLLA SETS TO WORK PREPARING ESHU'S STORIES ON HER GRAND-MOTHER'S COMPOUND.

WHAT STORY IS THAT?

YOUR ORIGIN STORY, OF COURSE.

YOU WERE BORN AS A MINOR WIND ORISHA, BUT THEN YOU STOLE YAMS FROM THE MASTER OF ALL GODS, **OLODUMARE.**

YES...AND THEN THAT STUFFY OLD SPIRIT WAS FORCED TO ACKNOWLEDGE MY GENIUS, AND MAKE ME A TRUE GOD.

BUT WHAT'S ALL THIS? I DON'T REMEMBER THIS PART.

DON'T YOU? BUT THAT'S MY FAVORITE PART.

"AFTER YOU STOLE THE YAMS FROM OLODUMARE, YOU GAVE THEM TO US HUMANS.

"THAT'S HOW WE LEARNED TO FARM FOOD THAT GROWS UNDERGROUND.

"OLODUMARE HAD BECOME VEXED WITH THE MORTALS FOR THEIR MODEST SACRIFICES.

"AS PUNISHMENT, HE SENT SHANGO TO STRIKE DOWN THEIR CROPS.

"IN THOSE DAYS, MORTALS ONLY KNEW OF FOOD THAT GREW ABOVE GROUND, SO WHENEVER SHANGO SENT HIS STORMS, THE REGION STARVED.

"SAFE FROM SHANGO'S LIGHTNING, THE REGION NEVER WENT HUNGRY AGAIN."

I'VE...NEVER HEARD THAT PART OF THE STORY BEFORE.

PERHAPS YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME AMONG ***KINGS*** AND ***WEALTHY MERCHANTS.*** POOR FOLKS TELL THIS VERSION ALL THE TIME, ON NIGHTS THAT OUR BOWLS ARE EMPTY.

IT GIVES US ***HOPE.*** FOR IF EVEN THE GREAT GOD OLODUMARE MAY BE ROBBED OF HIS YAMS... PERHAPS SOMEDAY, WE WILL NOT BE HUNGRY.

PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...

OH NO. THAT SOUNDS LIKE TUNDE!

ISN'T TUNDE YOUR DREAMY HUNTER? I THOUGHT YOU LIKED HIM.

OF COURSE I LIKE HIM. BUT--BUT I'M SUPPOSED TO BE AT OSHUN'S TEMPLE.

I CAN'T BE SEEN HERE. AND YOU CAN'T EITHER...COME, HIDE!

STRANGE, I COULD HAVE SWORN I SAW HER...WELL. I'LL JUST HAVE TO SEARCH THE BUSH FOREST AGAIN.

IS HE LOOKING FOR YOU?

O-OF COURSE NOT! TUNDE BARELY KNOWS I EXIST.

HE'S PROBABLY LOOKING FOR A RARE ANTELOPE, AS A GIFT FOR MORENIKE'S BRIDE PRICE.

PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...

THANK THE GODS-- HE'S GONE.

WHY WERE YOU SO AFRAID OF TUNDE SEEING YOU HERE?

BECAUSE-- *UM*--I'VE BEEN DYEING. SUCH WORK IS BENEATH A HIGH-RANKING BRIDE.

I WOULDN'T WANT TUNDE TO THINK I'M COMMON.

A MOON PASSES, AND LOLLA COMPLETES ANOTHER WRAPPER FOR ESHU.

I'VE HEARD THIS STORY! I INCITED CHAOS BETWEEN TWO RIVAL TRIBES.

THEY ALREADY HATED EACH OTHER, SO I DECIDED TO HAVE SOME FUN--I APPROACHED THE LEADER OF EACH TRIBE SEPARATELY, AND TOLD THEM THEY WERE DIVINELY DESTINED TO RULE THE OTHER TRIBE.

WAR BROKE OUT, OF COURSE.

BOTH SIDES CLAIMED THEY HAD THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN...AND SO THEY FOUGHT, EACH BITTERLY CONVINCED OF THEIR OWN BLESSING, UNTIL BOTH TRIBES WERE DEAD.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU'VE SHOWN IN THE WRAPPER.

BECAUSE THAT'S NOT THE STORY I KNOW.

IN THE VERSION I'VE HEARD, YOU APPEAR ON THE BATTLEFIELD, RIGHT AS THE TRIBES ARE ABOUT TO SLAUGHTER EACH OTHER.

THEY ***UNITE*** IN THEIR DETERMINATION NEVER TO BE FOOLED BY YOU AGAIN... AND THE TWO TRIBES LIVE IN HARMONY EVER AFTER.

BECAUSE OF MY TRICK.

BECAUSE OF YOUR LESSON.

YOU MOCK BOTH ARMIES TO THEIR FACES, REVEALING THAT YOU TRICKED BOTH OF THEM. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THE TRIBE LEADERS HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON... THEIR HATRED OF YOU, THE GREAT GOD ESHU.

ONE MOON PASSES. THEN TWO...THREE.

THE GIRL AND THE GOD DELIGHTED IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY. BUT SOON, THE MORNING WOULD COME WHEN MERCURY WAS CLOSEST TO EARTH.

LOLLA FINISHED HER LAST WRAPPER FOR ESHU, AND VISITED THE SHORE AT HIGH TIDE TO DRINK ESHU'S POTION.

YOU'RE STILL DETERMINED TO DO THIS? BENT ON DESTROYING THAT GIRL MORENIKE, AND MARRYING THAT FOOL OF A HUNTER TUNDE?

OF COURSE, LORD ESHU. WHY ELSE WOULD I HAVE MADE ALL THOSE WRAPPERS?

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS EXISTENCE, THE TRICKSTER GOD ESHU IS FILLED WITH TRUE SORROW.

HOW CAN YOU BE SO ***EXTRAORDINARY,*** AND YET SO ***COMMON?!*** HOW CAN A GIRL LIKE YOU--A GIRL SO RESILIENT, SO CLEVER, AND CAPTIVATING... WANT NOTHING MORE THAN ***WEALTH*** AND PETTY SECURITY?

YOU SEE? THAT'S WHY I LIKE YOU. YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN ROLES--SET PATHS DETERMINED BY BIRTH AND RANK.

YOU MAKE FOOLS OF GODS, AND BEGGARS OF KINGS.

BECAUSE YOU AREN'T REALLY THE GOD OF CHAOS.

NO...YOU'RE THE GOD OF ***FREEDOM.***

BUT I'M NOT LIKE YOU, ESHU. I'M NOT A GOD. I'M NOT EVEN ***LOLLA,*** NOT REALLY.

I'M A DAUGHTER. A BRIDE. LATER, I'LL BE THE MOTHER OF SOME MAN'S CHILDREN. WHAT IS A GIRL, BUT A ROLE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY?

SO WHY NOT SOMEONE AS HANDSOME AS TUNDE, WHO CAN SHOWER ME WITH JEWELS, AND DRAPE ME IN THE HIDES OF ANTELOPES?

GOODBYE, LORD ESHU.

*ESHU STORMS AWAY, FILLED WITH RAGE. HE TELLS HIMSELF THAT FOR HER PETTY MORTAL AMBITIONS, LOLLA **DESERVES** TO FALL INTO HIS TRAP. BUT AS HE RISES OVER THE BUSH FOREST ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE HEAVENS, HE HEARS A VOICE...*

PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...

IT'S BEEN MONTHS. HAS THAT EMPTY-HEADED MAN STILL NOT CAUGHT THAT ANTELOPE FOR MORENIKE?

PRETTY ONE...

LOLLA DESERVES BETTER THAN THIS FOOL. BUT I GUESS SHE'LL BE UPSET IF HE STARVES TO DEATH LOST IN A FOREST.

A GOD!

TOWN IS THAT WAY, MORTAL. ISN'T IT TIME YOU GAVE UP ON THIS FRUITLESS HUNT?

FORGIVE ME, DIVINE LORD. BUT I WILL ***NEVER*** STOP SEARCHING FOR MY LOVE.

THAT SET ON THIS MORENIKE GIRL, ARE YOU?

MORENIKE? NEVER HEARD OF HER.

WHAT? THEN WHAT IN THE GODS' NAME ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

NOT A WHAT. A WHO-- ***OYINLOLLA,*** BELLE OF THE OSHUN-ALIGNED.

SHE DISAPPEARED FROM THE TEMPLE MONTHS AGO, BUT I'M DETERMINED TO HAVE ONLY HER FOR A BRIDE.

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR MONTHS!

SHE DOESN'T KNOW TUNDE WANTS HER...

SHE'S ABOUT TO MAKE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE!

ESHU RACES BACK TO THE BEACH, DESPERATE TO STOP LOLLA FROM DRINKING THE POTION THAT WILL RENDER HER UNMARRIAGEABLE TO TUNDE. FOR THOUGH HE IS STILL FILLED WITH SORROW AT HER CHOICE...HE HAS COME TO LOVE LOLLA, AND DOES NOT WISH HER UNHAPPY.

BUT THE DEED IS DONE. LOLLA HAS DRUNK HIS CURSED POTION.

MY LORD ESHU... YOU CAME BACK.

I'M TOO LATE. YOU HAVE MY MARK.

OH...DID IT CHANGE ALREADY?

WHAT ARE YOU SMILING ABOUT? YOU'RE CURSED! YOU'RE BOUND TO ME NOW-- FOREVER.

IF YOU'RE LUCKY, TUNDE WILL MARRY YOU ANYWAY, BUT--

I NEVER WANTED TO MARRY, TUNDE, LORD ESHU.

YOU... LIED TO ME?

I TRICKED THE TRICKSTER.

FOR YOU SEE, LOLLA KNEW THAT CONTRARINESS WAS ESHU'S NATURE...AND SO SHE ASKED FOR THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT SHE REALLY WANTED.

BY SECURING ESHU'S MARK, SHE HAD ESCAPED FROM THE TEMPLE OF OSHUN. SO "CURSED," SHE COULD NOW LIVE AS HER GRANDMOTHER DID, AND DYE STORIES INTO CLOTH UNTIL SHE WAS OLD.

BUT NOW YOU'RE MY DEVOTEE.

I SUPPOSE I AM. AND WHILE I CAN'T BUILD YOU A TEMPLE...I HAVE WRAPPERS TO FILL WITH STORIES.

I WILL HAVE TO VISIT OFTEN, TO SUPERVISE YOUR WORK. I CAN'T LET YOU TELL MY STORIES WRONG.

I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY.

FOR THE REST OF LOLLA'S DAYS, ESHU AND LOLLA DYED WRAPPERS IN BLISSFUL SOLITUDE, AND HER FAME AS AN ARTISAN SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE REALM.

AND WHEN ESHU GREW OLD, PASSING INTO HIS NEXT CYCLE AND FORGETTING HIS PAST LIFE...LOLLA DYED A NEW WRAPPER, TO ENSURE HE WOULD REMEMBER THE STORY SHE LOVED BEST--THEIR OWN.

AND NOW, YOU HAVE HEARD MY HEART.

WELL, WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT-- THAT STORM'S PASSED! I SUPPOSE I'LL BE ON MY WAY.

ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T NEED MORE REST? THAT WAS A RIVETING STORY, BUT...YOU LOOK DIFFERENT.

I'M GLAD YOU ENJOYED MY STORY. DO HOLD ONTO IT.

I MIGHT ASK FOR IT BACK SOMEDAY.

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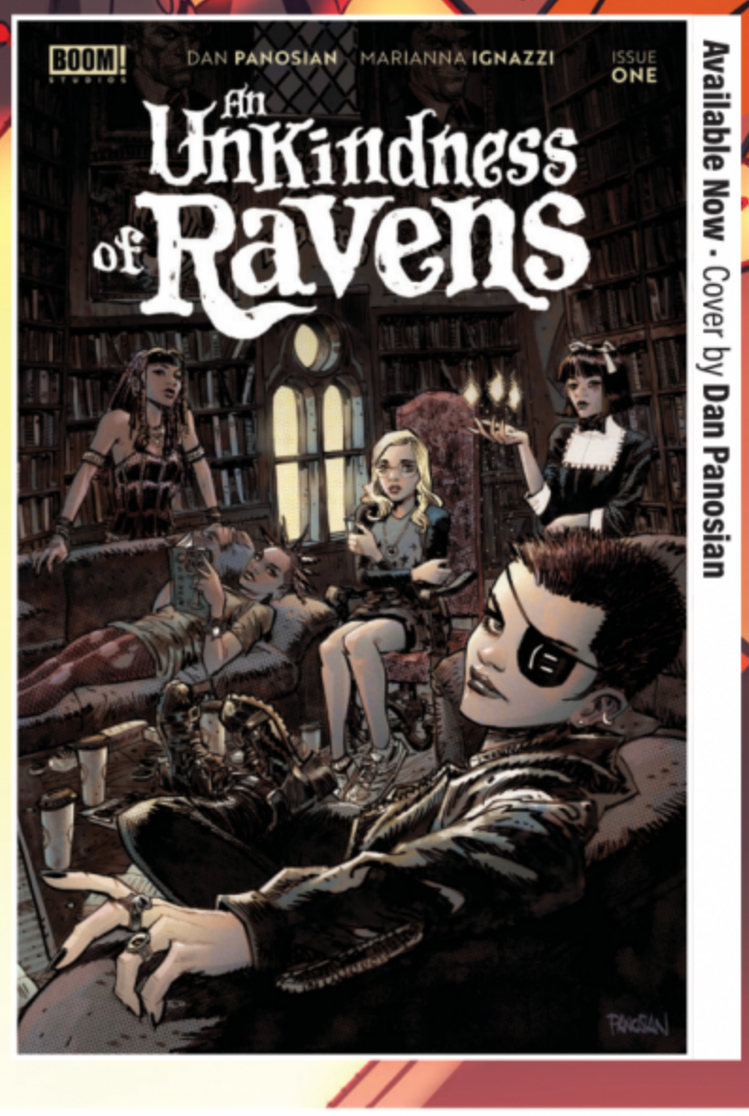

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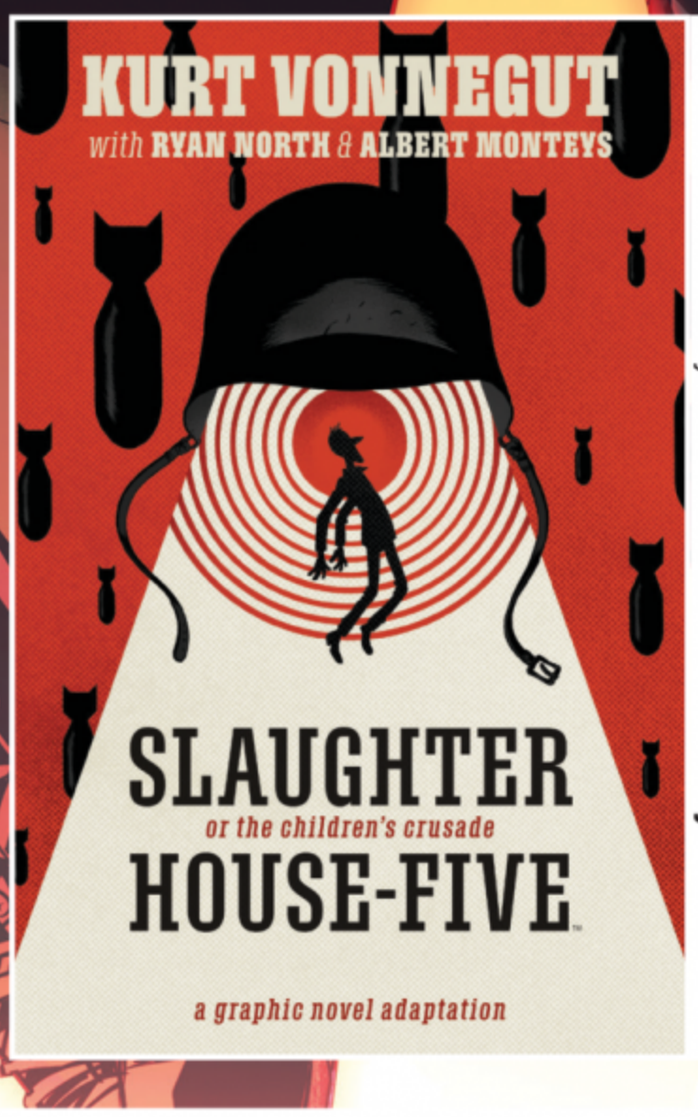

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